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WASHINGTON - NEWSPAPER EDITORS EXPRESSED SURPRISE AND DISMAY THURSDAY WHEN ADM. STANSFIELD TURNER, THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE, SAID THAT IN THREE SEPARATE INSTANCES HE HAD PERSONALLY APPROVED THE USE OF JOURNALISTS FOR SECRET INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS.

TURNER TOLD MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF NEWSPAPER EDITORS, WHO ARE MEETING HERE THIS WEEK, THAT IN NONE OF THOSE CASES WERE THE JOURNALISTS ACTUALLY PRESSED INTO SERVICE. HE DECLINED TO GIVE FURTHER DETAILS.

"WE FULLY SHARE THE RECOGNITION THAT JOURNALISM, RELIGION AND ACADEMIA HAVE A SPECIAL IMPORTANCE TO OUR COUNTRY," TURNER SAID. "AT THE SAME TIME WE RECOGNIZE THAT THERE MAY BE UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH AN INDIVIDUAL WHO IS ALSO A MEMBER OF ONE OF THOSE PROFESSIONS MAY BE USED AS AN AGENT."

MANY EDITORS SAID LATER THAT THEY HAD BEEN UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT CIA REGULATIONS BARRED THE USE OF AMERICAN JOURNALISTS AS AGENTS. THEY SAID THAT THEY HAD BEEN UNAWARE THAT CURRENT REGULATIONS, WHICH WERE ANNOUNCED BY THE CIA IN DECEMBER 1977, ALLOWED EXCEPTIONS TO BE MADE WITH THE SPECIFIC APPROVAL OF THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE.

EARLIER THIS YEAR TURNER TOLD BOTH THE SENATE AND HOUSE INTELLIGENCE COMITTEES WHAT HE TOLD THE EDITORS THURSDAY. LATER, BOTH REP. LES ASPIN, D.-WIS., AND CHAIRMAN OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF THE HOUSE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE, AND REP. EDWARD BOLAND, D.-MASS., CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSE INTELLIGENCE COMMITEE, ISSUED STATEMENTS SAYING THEY HAD REVIEWED THE THREE CASES TURNER CITED. THEY SAID THAT HE HAD NOT VIOLATED CIA REGULATIONS BY APPROVING THE USE OF THE THREE AS AGENTS. ASPIN SAID THAT ONE OF THEM WS A NONJOURNALIST EMPLOYED BY AN AMERICAN NEWS ORGANIZATION AND THAT THE OTHER TWO WERE PART-TIME JOURNALISTS NOT CURRENTLY EMPLOYED BY AMERICAN NEWS ORGANIZATIONS.

THE USE OF JOURNALISTS AS INTELLIGENCE AGENTS HAS LONG BEEN A SENSITIVE SUBJECT. INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES POINT OUT THAT AMERICAN JOURNALISTS ARE VALUED AS OPERATIVES BECAUSE THEY CAN MOVE ABOUT FREELY AND ASK QUESTIONS WITHOUT AROUSING SUSPICION AND HAVE USUALLY DEVELOPED GOOD SOURCES WITHIN FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS.

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